



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

# Talks For The Times

George M. Searle, C.S.P.



New York  
THE PAULIST PRESS  
120 West 60th Street



# TALKS FOR THE TIMES

**INDIFFERENTISM**

**REVELATION**

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCIENCE**

**THE FRIEND OF TRUE PROGRESS**

**THE PURPOSE OF LIFE**

**BY**

**GEORGE M. SEARLE, C.S.P.**

*Author of "Plain Facts," "How to Become a Catholic," etc., etc.*

**NEW YORK**

**THE PAULIST PRESS**

**120-122 WEST 60TH STREET**

**COPYRIGHT 1912, BY "THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF  
ST. PAUL, THE APOSTLE IN THE STATE  
OF NEW YORK "**

PUBLISHED UNDER THE  
AUSPICES OF THE  
CATHOLIC LITERATURE FOUNDATION  
OF THE CONVERTS' LEAGUE  
NEW YORK CITY



## INDIFFERENTISM.

### The Disease of the Age.

---

THOUGH I shall have occasion, of course, to refer to Scripture from time to time in this series of talks, they will not be expansions or explanations of particular texts. I shall therefore dispense with quoting such texts as introductions to each.

In beginning the discussion of the subjects to be treated in them, it may be remarked that this age or period in which we live may be called

**An Age of "Isms."**      one of "isms." By an "ism" I suppose we may understand, in the sense, at any rate, in which the word is used in a general way, some view or theory held by a number of persons on some matter not supposed to be capable of absolute demonstration. Thus even the teaching of the Catholic Church is often called "Catholicism," as meaning the view of a certain class of people known as Catholics as to Christianity. And it is plain, that as thought is given to subjects not supposed to be in the region of conclusive demonstration, the number of "isms" or views will tend to increase. So, as people do undoubtedly think a good deal in the present day, though not always deeply or logically, we have a constantly increasing number of them just now.

In the matter of religion, with which these "isms" are most concerned, there is obviously one which has recently gained more ground than any other. And that is the one which I have chosen for consideration, namely,



what is called "indifferentism." It is not, of course, any particular positive view as to religion, but a negative of any such as matter of firm belief. Still it is a view or an opinion; an opinion, that is to say, that there is no positive religious opinion that can be firmly held, or at any rate, that there will always be so much doubt that it is not worth while to hold any. At least it takes this form with such as might otherwise be interested in religious discussion. With many, however, it merely comes from want of such interest, or from a prevailing interest in other matters, such as honor, fame, power, wealth, pleasure, or having a good time generally; and with a few, from absorption in some occupation in the regions of science, art, or literature. All these are content enough to hear that nothing can be learned with certainty about religious problems, so that they need not take time for them which they would rather spend in more congenial ways.

However, we may explain it, as a  
**The Decline of Worship.** matter of fact, we find, outside of the Catholic Church, a very different state of things from that which existed a few decades ago. In the middle of the last century members of the various Protestant denominations not only had a decided belief in Protestantism as against the Catholic Church, but also in the special doctrines of their own sect; they expected their clergymen to assert them and explain them from time to time, and they went to church not merely to worship God in a general way, but also to testify their own adherence to their own doctrinal belief. They did not have any idea that one church was as good as another, though they might admit that those who belonged to a

church differing from their own might be saved, if sound on what they considered the most important or essential points. But they were distinctly and from conviction, for instance, Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians. They believed in their own doctrines as being those taught in the Bible, which they almost all regarded as the inspired word of God.

It was, therefore, as they believed, very important to attend Divine service on Sunday, though they did not, as we Catholics do with regard to Holy Mass, consider such attendance as a matter of absolute precept, requiring a clear and distinct excuse if it was to be omitted. Even among those comparatively unorthodox, such as the Unitarians, practically every one was to be found in church on Sundays, and probably in the afternoon as well as in the morning.

**The Percentage of  
Church-Goers.**

But now, how is it? I have recently seen a statement in a daily paper, which is probably approximately correct, as to the ninety million people in this country, that twenty million of them go to church regularly, twenty million irregularly, and fifty million never. This statement seems to be intended to include the Catholic Church, otherwise the total would be too great, for the non-Catholics do not amount to ninety million. So I think that if it was thoroughly sifted, it would be found that about half of the twenty million going, accordingly to this statement, to church regularly would be found to be Catholics; making the showing for non-Catholics still poorer. It may be, however, that the author of it, or the statistics which he quotes, may count Catholics who go to early Masses among the fifty million

who never go to church at all; for there seems to be great ignorance among non-Catholics on this point.

However without going too accurately into the figures, there is no doubt about the main fact, namely, that a great majority of our non-Catholic fellow countrymen (men, I may say, especially, for the women, undoubtedly, do better) though belonging nominally to some religious denomination, either don't go to church at all, or at best only irregularly. And, furthermore, that many of those who do go regularly or irregularly, do not go for any decided preference of one church over another, but merely for convenience of location, or to hear some particular clergyman, or the discussion of some interesting topic, political or social, but not distinctly religious. And probably this is true of quite a number who may even be members in full standing, or communicants, of one denomination or another.

Some years ago, I had the privilege of attending a discussion after a largely attended dinner of a denominational club in New York, the principal topic of which discussion was how to get the people—especially the men—to come to church. One very prominent clergyman said that almost all his people who came had already, as the phrase is, experienced religion. It was of no use to try to convert them, for they were already converted. How to get at the unconverted: that was the question.

**How to Reach the Un-converted.**

They had invited me to tell something about how we Catholics managed. When it came my turn, I told them that the trouble with us was more likely to be how to keep the people out of the church. We sometimes had lectures for non-Catholics, at which no Catholic was wanted,

unless he or she brought a Protestant friend; but Catholics, though without such friends to bring, would try to slip in. As I expressed it, you would have to use a stick to keep them out. And at the time we happened to be having a mission, and it was the week for the married men. So I said, if you go to our church this evening, you will see about two thousand men. If we let the women in, the church wouldn't hold them. So we don't have much difficulty about the question under discussion. It wasn't very kind, but I had to let them know the actual state of the case.

In fact, every Sunday we have about nine thousand at church, and about as many men as women at our Paulist church in New York.

Well, the clergyman, whom I have just mentioned, if disposed to push the matter further, might have said that our Catholic attendants at our regular services corresponded to those who had experienced religion in his, and that the question still remained how we would get at those who called themselves Catholics, but did not attend church as they should. He did not say this; but at any rate I explained how we did get at them by our missions, for they would, almost all of them, come for those. But he might have gone on to say, "how do you get at those whom we are trying to reach, those who do not call themselves Catholics?" Here we would have to acknowledge that, though we are making some progress, it is not as yet very rapid. Our success is principally among those who do take an interest, and perhaps have some strong beliefs, in religion; but who are prejudiced against ours and more or less ignorant about them. When they know what ours really are, their prejudices often

disappear. About thirty thousand Americans become Catholics, in this way, every year; but it would take a long time to convert the whole people, at this rate.

The great obstacle, not only to our efforts, but to those of any others who are earnest about religion is

**The Obstacle of Indifference.**

not, now, any positive contrary belief on the part of our hearers or readers, but this indifferentism which has become so prevalent. It has its effect not only against the success of our Catholic missions, but also against the revivals among the evangelical sects, which formerly were so powerful in producing church members. Formerly most of those who attended these revivals took for granted that to have a pledge of salvation they must "experience religion;" but now most of them have lost this idea. Not only have they lost it, but they have no confidence that there is any such thing as salvation at all. They don't object to any one else thinking that there is; perhaps they have a certain amount of respect for this or any other religious conviction, and they have none that they wish to substitute for it. They simply regard this as an open question, which always will stay open, for there is no one who can decide it. It seems to them a matter of indifference what any one may think about it; one man's opinion is as good as another's about it, and no opinion at all is as good as any. They have no objection to hearing what various opinions there may be, and they are always ready to hear any new one, like the Athenians, when St. Paul preached to them, who "employed themselves in nothing else, but either in telling or in hearing some new thing." Any new "ism" is of interest to them; but the only one which sticks to them is

“indifferentism.” The rest run like water off a duck’s back. Even St. Paul himself made few converts at Athens.

Now let us look a little closer into the causes of this indifferentism, which is now the most fatal obstacle to religion in this country and many others.

One cause of course is, as has been said, an absorbing interest in other matters, such as wealth, honor, pleasure, or the pursuit of some physical science, or other pleasing intellectual occupation. These have probably a stronger hold than they ever had before, for the simple reason that in past ages any indulgence in pleasure, except in the very lowest forms, was open only to the few, whereas now, in those countries which we call civilized, the masses have great present opportunities, and still greater hopes along these lines. In fact, our modern so-called civilization presents these things as all that there is of importance or worth striving for in this world, or even in another, should there be another. The popular idea of heaven would be simply what we understand by civilization perfected, with all the conveniences we now enjoy immensely increased and within reach of every one. If that is coming, people would say so much the better; but meanwhile, let us get as near to it as we can now. If it isn’t, if there is nothing after death for us who are living now, let us be glad that those who come after us will be happier than we have been; but let us make the most of what we have; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.

**The Causes of Indifferentism.**

**Materialism**

You will notice that any idea of God, or of any pos-

sible closer association with Him, seems to be left out of the modern idea of human happiness.' The common notion seems to be that if there be a God (and most people still suppose that there probably is), He is even now very kind, good, and serviceable to us in giving us all these enjoyments, and will be still more so in the future; but that He Himself is not the end or purpose of our existence. No, on this common idea, He is simply a means to this end.

No wonder, then, that we, if these are our impressions, are not very much interested in religion. We do not care about God in Himself, but only about what He will do for us, and if He is not going to do much, we can do pretty well for ourselves. At any rate, knowing about Him is not going to make much difference. This simple fact, then, that we have got so many other things which seem more conducive to happiness than the knowledge of God, and apparently so many more coming, is one reason for the indifference to religion so prevalent to-day. But there is another which probably has even more to do with it. Were it not for this other, the desire to know more about God, which never can be destroyed in us, would be much more evident than it is.

And this reason is that experience seems to show that we cannot satisfy it, so that it is of no use to try.

**Agnosticism.** There are so many people that have tried, and what have their efforts accomplished? Only recently we have

seen an account of a new religion which some worthy man, not connected with any regular denomination, was proposing to us. And that was only one out of hundreds that have been proposed, not merely in

general, but as being the true Christian one. But it—or any new one—only makes things worse. It is so different, we say, in the things of this world. If the problem is to get a new and better kind of light, some Edison comes along and gives us an improvement over what we had before; if we want to fly like birds (and we always have wanted that), we don't go on forever wanting, but the Wright Brothers make a machine that is a practical success. If religion is to be a success then, some one ought to produce a religion that is evidently better than the previous ones, and that will be universally adopted. But we don't find anything like that. If a new religion is invented, we only have one thousand and one, instead of the one thousand we had before, and no one can be sure which is the best. Can you blame us, then, for being indifferent in the matter? We would not be indifferent if some one would only solve the religious problem, which we certainly acknowledge would be a most important one, if it only could be solved. But it not only is not solved, but no progress seems to be made toward its solution.

Of course we Catholics, if well instructed and grounded in our religion, are not inclined to indifferentism for this reason. There is nothing surprising or disturbing to us personally on account of it; though we are sorry that well meaning people should thus waste their time. It is evident to us that nothing else can be expected. The result is precisely similar to what it would be if a number of school boys should undertake to do an example in arithmetic, but set out with a positive assurance that the answer in the book was wrong. That was just the trouble at the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century, that the answer in the book, the answer given by the



Catholic Church, was taken for granted to be wrong. Any view might be correct, but that one was out of the question. And so they go blundering on, getting now and then a new answer, sometimes pretty near the right one, but on the whole diverging more and more from it, and having less and less confidence in those they get; and at last the conclusion comes to be that there isn't any absolutely true religion, that no one knows which is the truest, and that it isn't worth while to bother much about it.

What, then, has brought about this indifferentism?

In answer, I would say, that it seems, without doubt, that the predominant cause, really, of this indifferentism of to-day is to be found in the Protestant Reformation; that is, in the assumption then made that Christ had

**The Protestant Reformation.** not left His promise to keep the faith of His Church intact; that the true Christian religion had been lost, and that it had now to be rediscovered by human ingenuity and research. And it has led now, in most people's minds, to this result; not merely that it cannot be rediscovered, but that true Christianity of this sort never existed, and that there never was anything else of the kind; that the theory of dogma, the definite reaching of truth by Divine authority, was an error of the past. The only hope for the future is the recognition that instead of this being an error, it is the only right procedure; that, if we only will drop this schoolboy idea that the answer in the book must be wrong, all our difficulties will disappear, and we shall be able to use as profitably the faculties God has given us in religious matters, as we can in those of this world. I hope to show this even more clearly in the next talk.

## **REVELATION.**

### **"A Divine Fact."**

---

I think there can be no doubt, from the facts already considered, that the indifferentism as to religion which is so noticeable to-day is due principally to the failure of the inquiries and investigations, so many of which have been and are continually being

**What is Christianity?** made, to come to any agreement, or to arrive at any certain result, even as to what may be truly and rightly called Christianity. Most persons interested in the matter—in this country at any rate—would probably grant that if we could only find out for certain just what Christ taught, the teachings of Mohammed or Buddha would not weigh much in the scale, compared with it. But there is the trouble. The more inquiry is made, the more obscure and confused everything seems to become. In matters of physical science; we meet no such difficulty. We meet, it is true, sometimes, with results which are puzzling, and may seem contradictory to other results; but after a while things straighten out, and become more and more intelligible. The studies of scientific men tend constantly to agreement; they accept each others' conclusions. Diversity is only temporary: it yields, sooner or later, to demonstrations one way or the other. But in religious thought, diversity seems to be permanent, and always increasing.

It is plain enough, then, that truth or even agreement not seeming attainable by religious discussion, even those most sincerely desirous of finding the truth about religion must become more or less indifferent to such discussion.

But now comes the question, why is it that the discussion is so fruitless? That it is so is the reason for indifferentism; yes, but what is the reason why it is so? What is the fundamental difficulty? There is another question much like this, which might be asked, and the answer, I think, is much the same to each. What is this other question? It is this: Why didn't people in old times find out more about the laws of nature that we are discovering so rapidly now? Why did they have such ridiculous ideas about many matters of natural science that seem so clear to us? Why was the discussion about them *then* as fruitless as that about religion seems to be *now*?

The answer to all this, it would seem, is because they had an idea that these laws of nature could and should be got at simply by some philosophical, that is to say purely intellectual, principles. They expected to deduce from such first principles what the laws of nature ought to be, rather than to find by observation what they actually are. The four elements, as they called them, namely, earth, water, air and fire, seemed to them quite sufficient to account for all the properties of matter. Why, then, should there be any more? This quadruple arrangement was so simple; like the four corners of a building, or the four winds of heaven. And, moreover, if some one like Aristotle, acknowledged to be a great genius, had given much thought to any such subject, and held some particular view, that was practically enough to settle it. As if mere thought, however piercing, could settle such things!

They did not realize that in these matters, we must not begin by thinking, but by keeping our eyes open,

and seeing what is going on. Thought has its place later, but not at the start. Some strange things they could not help noticing, such as that the loadstone attracted iron, or that amber (the Greek name for which was "electron") when rubbed had the same effect on a good many light substances. But this was, to them, simply an "occult" property; "if we think more about it, we shall find out some reason," they would say. But the idea of making

observations, not by chance, but on purpose; of making what we call experiments, hardly occurred to them.

**A Wrong Method.**

If it had they would have found out that sometimes there was a repulsion, instead of an attraction; they would soon have got not a few isolated phenomena, but quite a number connected together, and would have begun to see some kind of a law which connected them. Then, when they had plenty of material for thought to work on, it could accomplish something, and physical science would begin to be formed.

Well, it may be asked, what has all this got to do with religion? Certainly we seem to be making enough experiments in that; but nothing comes of them.

Yes, that is quite true. But I do not mean to say that religion and natural science are to be investigated just in the same way. What I do mean is that each should be treated in the way proper to it. Religion, in some respects, is like physical science, but in some it differs from it. Let us see just what these are.

We can begin, in religion, by thinking; for in our own minds, with very little help from outside, we can find out a good deal about God. Reason, rightly used, will show us that God is One; that He is all-good, all-

powerful, and all-wise, that He has created us and implanted in us a moral law to direct our actions; the law which we call conscience. It is true that our passions interfere a good deal with our clear recognition of all this; but still as much as this was known to those who would think at all times. But a limit to what can be found out by mere thought, in matters of religion, is sure to be reached by those who simply go on thinking. And yet there is much beyond that limit that we want, and really need, to know. The most obvious need is regarding a future life for us after death. This was the great question for the thoughtful and serious in ancient Greece and Rome; and it is now the one that agitates our friends of the Society for Psychical Research, particularly in England and America, who hope to settle it by spiritual communications, proofs of identity, etc. These later are right in one way; that is to say, they realize that when it comes to this question of a future life, merely intellectual labor is useless; there is nothing within us that will suffice to settle it. We must get something more than mere speculation; we absolutely need information, not from each other, but from some one who knows, and moreover will tell us the truth. That is the weak point, and the great danger, for our psychical or spiritistic friends; it does seem quite reasonable for them to believe that they are getting some information from outside themselves, but what guarantee can they have that this information is true? For of course it might be given purposely to mislead.

Well, this brings us to a clear indication of what our next step must be, if we are to have what may be called a scientific treatment of the religious question, such as

we have of physical or material ones, we must have information from one who knows, and can be trusted to tell the truth. We must quit making theories, even such as might seem to be founded on what we know of God, and look for facts. We must give up the old method which failed so signally in investigating physical science, of speculation as to what the Divine laws ought to be; we must find out what they actually are. We must, for instance, stop saying, "God is good, therefore He will make us all good and happy at last," or anything of that kind. That is just as unscientific (so to speak) as it was to maintain there were only four elements in the physical universe.

The reason, then, why non-Catholic religious discussion of late has been so fruitless is, after all, just the same as why that about physical science used to be. It is on the wrong lines; those of invented theories, not of discovered facts.

The question, therefore, is reduced to this: where shall we obtain the facts we need? They must come to us from outside ourselves, just as those of physical science do; particularly those (like for example, the state of things at the North or South Pole) which we cannot verify by our personal observation.

There really seems to be no one who can be depended on to inform us about these facts, which we need for a true religious belief, except Almighty God Himself. Others, like spirit communication through mediums, may be in possession of them, but we cannot be sure that they are willing to give us correct information.

But with regard to God Himself, it is of course cer-

tain in the first place that He knows everything in this matter, as in every other. And it is

**God Alone Knows.** also certain that He cannot misinform us. It is axiomatic that ( as we say in our "act of faith") He can neither deceive nor be deceived. He may, it is true, keep silence; there are of course innumerable things that He could tell us which we would like to know. But we can hardly doubt that He will not keep us in ignorance of what is necessary for us to obtain true happiness, or (what is the same thing) to serve Him as He wishes that we should. It seems, therefore, evident that He must have given us all needed information on these points, which otherwise would remain beyond our reach. In other words, it follows, from His necessary goodness and love for us, that He must have made, for His own sake and for ours, a definite revelation to supplement and complete what we can obtain by our natural powers of reasoning; to increase in us, if only we truly desire it, that light of natural religion which, as St. John says, "enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world."

I say, "if only we truly desire it;" and this is a very important qualification. For to force this light upon us, if we are going to shut our eyes to it, will only serve to increase our condemnation, that is to say our final misery. As again St. John says, "this is the judgment; because the light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil." We must not only need, we must also earnestly desire the revelation, if we are to have it.

We must not, therefore, though we may be sure that

this needed Divine revelation has been made, expect it to be so clear and evident that we cannot help seeing and recognizing it. We ought not to think that it is to be like the sun in the heavens which cannot be ignored; but rather like a beautiful star, shining in the darkness of our night, not compelling us to turn our eyes away from the earthly lights around us, but inviting us to gaze on it and study it, and rewarding us richly if we are so inclined. There is one thing that we may be sure of, that God, much as He loves us, is not going to compel our free will to His service. He wants us to seek Him, to be interested in Him; and He shows Himself enough for that; but He will not force Himself on us, for fear (so to speak) that we may turn away. When the angels appeared to the shepherds to announce His coming to us, they did not say, "Peace to all men;" but "on earth peace to men of good will." And we are not told (though we commonly imagine it) that

**Look for the Star.** the star which appeared to the wise men was an extremely bright one; indeed, people generally do not seem to have seen it. But the wise men saw it, because they were looking and hoping for a star. They had in mind what Balaam had prophesied, "a star shall rise out of Jacob."

This, then, is what mankind, in its darkness and confusion about matters of religion, has to expect. Not that it can excogitate a religion of its own ability; nor that men, by comparing their ideas, and reasoning with each other on them, can come to some agreement; but that God Himself, of His great mercy, will reveal to them what they can not ascertain by their own natural power. But still it must be expected that the revelation will not



be so plain and manifest that the careless and indifferent will have it forced on them. That is to say, those who are careless and indifferent, because the pleasures and prizes of this world are all that they care for or are interested in. But as for those who have become indifferent simply because the problem of religion has seemed insoluble, such can solve it if they will only try in the right way; that is, by looking for facts, as they are, instead of truths which they think ought to be.

Such will find, as a matter of fact, that this revelation has always been expected, and that there have been

**The Expectation of Revelation.** signs of it from the beginning. They will see these signs most clearly in

the history of that wonderful chosen people of God, the children of Israel, to whom He showed so plainly what was to come, but who, when it did come, for the most part rejected it, for precisely the same reason that so many do now; that is, because all their care and interest was for the things of earth.

But those who do care to look at the facts will see in the actual advent of Christ this accomplishment of the promised and necessary revelation. Most, even of our doubters of to-day, recognize that it is to be looked for in Christ's teachings, if it can be found anywhere at all.

Why, then, do they not find it there? Why do even those who are willing, as it would seem, to believe what Christ taught, fail to agree?

For this again we must seek the cause just where it is mainly to be found for indifferentism in general among the well meaning and sincere; that is, in the false and unscientific principle proposed in the Protestant Reformation; namely, of not regarding Christianity as a

Divine fact, but as a doctrine to be constructed according to our own ideas.

To one who looks at it as a Divine fact, it is plain that He who made the revelation must have taken the means necessary for its preservation; that it is absolutely

**The Preservation of  
Revelation.**

inconceivable that He could have trusted it to the ingenuity of mankind in the interpretation of historical records, or of the fragmentary documents, which make up the New Testament, inspired by Him though they be. For us to learn and understand the fact of revelation, it must be a permanent and ever present fact accessible to all, as the facts of nature are. What progress could we make in any science if all we had to go on were some remarks, however true, made about it nearly two thousand years ago? No, the facts must be always with us, so that we can examine them without fear of error. And there is absolutely no conceivable way for this, unless God Himself will remain visibly with us, except by having some institution provided by Him to keep and guard these facts of revelation, to distinguish them from mere human opinions, and to give an absolutely certain answer to inquiries we may make concerning them. If we grant, as all evidence, internal and external, requires that we should, the existence, as a fact, of Divine revelation, the existence of an institution like the Church as the guardian and preserver of it necessarily follows.

It hardly need say that not only is the necessity of this method evident *a priori*, but that He Himself who made the revelation distinctly told us that it was the one that He was to adopt; that He was to found this Church on the Rock of Peter, and to be with it through all ages.

The Catholic Church and its teachings is, then, the only possible scientific form of Christianity, as a revelation to inform us of those matters concerning religion that we need to know, and cannot know in any other way. To turn a deaf ear to it is just the same as it would be to refuse to look at the well ascertained results of any other science, and indulge in our own fancies instead. Nor does it content itself with merely enunciating and repeating a few ascertained facts. No; having these facts, it has something for reasoning to proceed on; the science which it guards can be enlarged and developed; and being a true science there is no danger of its running counter to any other true science. I hope to show next that the Catholic Religion is not in conflict with any of the ascertained results of human science.

---

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCIENCE.

---

I have said that I should hope to show that the Catholic Church was not opposed to physical science. It would seem that there ought to be no need to prove this; the burden of proof ought to rest on those who should maintain that it was so opposed. Such an opposition ought not to be presumed in a religion which has itself the marks of a true science in being founded on facts, and developed by conclusions

**A Strange Notion.** drawn from them. But still the idea of this opposition, mainly proceeding from ignorance as to what its teachings really are, has got

such a hold on the minds of non-Catholics that it has become practically necessary for us to follow a line which, reasonably or logically, we should not be asked or expected to take. Some of our opponents seem to be quite sure that, if they only say the one word "Galileo," they have quite stopped off any possible reply on our part. If by any chance that should fail, why then to say "evolution" will surely settle our whole business. It is really amusing (or would be, at any rate, if the matter were not so serious), to see how far the depth of their ignorance, even among those who ought to know better, will carry our critics, when they calmly produce their supposed "crushers." I actually heard not long ago, for instance, of a case where a professor, who, I suppose, was really learned in his own subject, thought he had accomplished this crushing effect by remarking that a man (or woman either, of course,) could not possibly develop into an angel. He meant, it would seem, that there was no rudimentary structure in the human anatomy which could develop wings in addition to the arms with which angels are commonly represented. He seems to have supposed that the Catholic Church actually taught that angels were material beings like ourselves, with wings growing out of the backs of their shoulders. Such a notion might, of course, be quite excusable in a little child; but a learned professor ought to be a little more cautious in his class-room. Of course no one, not even a learned professor, can be expected to know everything; but with a little care he can manage to know what he is talking about. A very slight glance at the most elementary theology would have been enough to show our professor that the Church has always defined

angels as purely spiritual beings, without any bodily form or nature whatever; having really no wings, or arms either. If he had no time or inclination to take such a glance, obviously he should simply have kept his mouth shut, so as not—I may perhaps say—to put his foot in it.

Of course, another strange blunder in his remark was to suppose that a **A Strange Blunder.** Catholic, or indeed any Christian, believed that even women “developed” into angels in the future life. But let us not spend any more time on this little instance, which I only mention as an illustration.

The general notion, which is the cause of such strange blunders, is that the Catholic—and perhaps the whole Christian—religion is simply a collection of beliefs and imaginations, with very little foundation in fact, handed down among credulous people, and to some extent of course committed to writing; and that Catholics, in particular, are in some unaccountable way, just like a flock of sheep, indeed liking to be so called; so that, like sheep, if the front one jumps over some even imaginary obstacle, all the rest will do the same. Those who have this notion may indeed acknowledge that in the ordinary affairs of life, we Catholics may show (pretty nearly at any rate) as much sense as other people, but that when it comes to religion, we are ready to swallow anything that the priest may choose to tell us. As to the priests themselves, our friends outside may have a suspicion that they are let somewhat more into the secrets of the matter, and do not really believe all that they tell the people; but that they have to pretend to, of course, except just among themselves. The bishops, probably, are even better posted; and as for the Pope himself,

he of course knows the whole thing, like a Mason of the highest degree. But obviously it would never do for any of the clergy to let the people know, for it would spoil the collections.

Probably, however, there are few  
**Some Wrong Ideas.** that are at all well acquainted personally with us, who have these crude and absurd ideas. But at any rate, many think that we are a class of people more governed by sentiment than by reason; that religion is an emotional matter with us, and that if it appeals to our feelings, we do not so much mind whether our intellect is satisfied or not. As for those of us who seem to be of an intellectual character, such are imagined to be all the while struggling against their doubts and difficulties, and putting them down, if at all, by main force. It does not seem to be realized that though of course there are difficulties and perplexities in any scientific study, when we get outside the limits of pure observation, and begin to think and put our results together, we are in no exceptional position in that respect. What difference there may be is due to our dealing with a higher subject, the mysteries of God Himself being greater and deeper than those of His created works. But even in these last we are now seeing more and more plainly every day that there are mysteries toward the solution of which we have as yet made very little progress. Sir Isaac Newton, more than two centuries ago, announced the law of gravitation according to the inverse squares of the distances as being sufficient to account for the movements of the heavenly bodies, and all mathematical investigations since made confirm his results. But we are as far as ever from under-

standing how there can be such a force as gravitation, how it can work from one body to another without any intervening medium, or even with such a medium without any time being required for transmission. We also are apt to imagine that in recent times we have found out a great deal about electricity, and we are now trying to explain many properties of matter by means of it. But if any one asks, "What is electricity?" we are no more able to answer than we were at the outset. But all this does not give us any doubts to struggle against, about the existence of matter, gravitation or electricity.

There is, however, one line along which a good deal of progress has been made in physical science; that is to say the ascertaining of definite

**An Objection.** laws like that of gravitation, which will enable us to predict, though without understanding them, how they will work; how much and what kind of effect will be produced in any given conditions. And these laws have become so prominent in the minds of many as to make them think that everything in the universe (even God Himself, they would say, if there be a God) must work according to these automatic laws. And that therefore religion, which asserts the existence of events depending apparently for their significance on violations of these laws, cannot be considered as a scientific system. In other words, that revealed religion, as it asserts the existence of miracles in evidence of it, must be dismissed from scientific consideration.

This objection must certainly seem plausible to many, and it has had great weight with many otherwise inclined to believe. I think, however, people are beginning to see

the fallacy of it in recent years, as they are realizing the difference between spirit and matter, and the control of the former over the latter.

One would think that it ought to be evident to any intelligent human being that, however it may be with the planets and the material universe generally, he himself is not governed by any such automatic laws in his own interior action; and, moreover, that he has considerable power of resisting and modifying their action in

their own domain. A man, for ex-

**Miracles.**

ample, holds in his hand a stone, which automatically tends to fall to

the ground; but it is absurd to think that his holding it or letting it drop depends on any automatic law. He may not be able to hold it, if he has been starved for a long time, but he does not necessarily hold it simply because he has the strength to do so. He can hold it or not, just as he chooses. His action does not, like the movements of the planets, depend on merely physical conditions, nor is it calculable by any physical law. It simply depends on his free will. Every one of us is, therefore, constantly working what, judging merely by physical laws, would be considered miracles. Not that the physical laws cease to operate, but a psychical or spiritual force comes in to prevent their effect. We are familiar with such phenomena; but if the material body through which the spiritual force acts were invisible and impalpable, they would appear to be simply miraculous, and we should seek in vain for any law which would explain them. Even as it is we can find no such law. Furthermore, no reason can be assigned why there should necessarily be any material organism through which the



free or lawless spiritual force must work; and why it can work any better on, or through an organism than without it cannot be explained. To account for the miraculous events, as we call them, which are assumed by the opponents of religion to be impossible, we have then only to suppose invisible spiritual forces such as we know to exist in ourselves; they do not necessarily mean in most cases any interruptions to natural laws at all. And even if the case should seem to be one of such interruption, it is absurd to suppose that a natural law, however regular in its working, can get beyond the control of Him whom natural religion, independent of revelation, shows to be the Author of nature. The whole case against the possibility of miracles is then merely childish and silly. All that can be reasonably said is that the presumption is against such as are infrequent, and the causes for which are not apparent. They ought to be established by good and conclusive evidence, and the Catholic Church has always followed this rule.

As this matter has been one of the principal supposed issues between natural science and religion, it has been perhaps worth while to spend

**Materialism Losing.** some little time in clearing it up. But among scientific men who are really up to date, psychical forces have of late been so generally recognized that this issue is disappearing. Materialism has lost, to a very great degree, the grip which it had a few decades ago.

Now as to cases like the celebrated Galileo one, to which I have already alluded. To discuss this particular matter in detail is hardly needed just now, as it has been most thoroughly treated, over and over again, by Catholic

authors, and anyone who wishes to know the facts can easily learn them. Most intelligent persons now understand that the recognized dogmatic authority of the Church has been in no way compromised by it; though, humanly speaking, there was danger that it might be. The fact that it was not only adds to the strength of the proof of the Divine guidance over the Church. But cases more or less similar are, at any time, liable to occur. It may be well to say a word about them in general.

They are due to the imperfection which will always be found in human sciences in the progress of their development, and which still exists in almost all, mathematical planetary astronomy being the principal exception. A good case to illustrate this may be found in the sciences of geology and of absolute physics, the former of which adopting the theory of Lyell, which for a good while was generally accepted, required a greater age for the world than physicists were inclined to allow. Here was a conflict, not between religion and science, but between one natural science and another. As we live in an age in which it is impossible for any one to be an all-round scientist, or, in which every investigator must needs be a specialist, arguing principally from the facts of his own specialty; and as this state of things tends to be more and more pronounced, these conflicts must tend to be more frequent. But still the cause of them, namely, the imperfection of our knowledge, being pretty generally realized, they are not likely to discredit science in general, but only to make its leaders more prudent. Of course in sciences, generally speaking, there is no difficulty except that of some humiliation, in taking the back track, in retracting dogmas once laid down. In the Catholic

religion there would be more difficulty, as to retract dogmatic statements as to the faith once made by the supreme authority is inadmissible; but in spite of this, we feel no danger, as we know that in these, we rest not on human wisdom or prudence, but in that of Almighty God, which never can fail, and of course never has failed.

I shall only have time here to speak of one other matter, in regard to which many of our opponents imagine that the teaching of the Church has already been disproved by natural science. You will probably, and correctly, surmise that I refer to the much talked of and much misunderstood matter of evolution.

Popular ignorance is rather dense on this matter. But this is not surprising, when we see how much this is the case even with regard to mathematical astronomy, which is the most complete physical science (as I have remarked), and even with regard to mathematics itself. In the newspapers and other popular literature, the impression is—we may say—sedulously cultivated that it has actually been ascertained as a fact that we have actually and historically descended or been evolved from monkeys, and, therefore, that Adam and Eve are merely myths, and that the whole Christian religion, especially the Catholic, has gone by the board. It certainly looks, in the popular mind, like a very serious difficulty for us. And yet, in fact, in the actual state of the case, there is hardly a difficulty at all. It is, I say, hardly a difficulty at all. And why is it not? In the first place, because this historical and actual descent of man from the monkey is a matter, in the nature of the case, utterly impossible to prove. Even supposing that all the “missing links” so

eagerly sought for were discovered, either merely in bodily shape in the fossil records of the past, or even now living in some unexplored regions of the earth, they would furnish no proof whatever that the human being of the present day was descended from their ancestors. Unless it could be shown that Adam and Eve themselves were actually and historically of the class of missing links, religion would be unharmed; and this of course is impossible. There can never, indeed, be any proof that we are descended from what are believed to have been men, in the stone age, or any other, whose bodies we find by excavation.

Secondly, the principal point in the matter with which religion is concerned is with regard to what it recognizes as the human soul, by

**The Soul.**

which, as we hold, man chiefly differs from the brute creation. But this is a point utterly beyond the reach of physical science. Mere intelligence, even far beyond what the highest of brutes have ever shown, does not prove the presence of the soul, nor does the lack of such intelligence show its absence. Religion simply tells us that any being descended from Adam and Eve has received a human soul, not descended or evolved from those of his ancestors, but newly and specially created. This is a matter on which physical science has absolutely nothing to say that affects us. Its investigators may say that they do not believe that such is the case; well, that is merely their own opinion, not a part of their science. They may just as well say that they do not believe in heaven, hell, or purgatory. We do not maintain that they should, on the grounds of merely physical science. But there is nothing in all that to pre-

vent our believing in these things. Our scientific critics believe, indeed have to believe, in innumerable facts of the present day, for instance, with which physical science has no concern.

But it may be asked: "Is not the Catholic Church opposed to evolution altogether?"

It seems a strange question to ask, when the Church itself points with such pride to her own evolution, to the development, that is to say, of her own doctrine and the magnificent structure of reason that has been based on it, and of her forms and ceremonies of worship.

Unbelief in evolution altogether would be simply absurd. It is evident that circumstances must have an effect in the formation of all things, whether material or immaterial. It must be admitted—and we have no difficulty in doing so—that even the special Darwinian notion of evolution by natural selection, or the survival of the fittest, is a process that *a priori* ought to go on, whether it actually does or not. But the question is: How rapidly and to what extent can it go on; can it produce what can be rightly called a new species, at any rate in the time to which it must be restricted? And is there any actual evidence whatever that all the species now existing have been evolved from original protoplasm? Only the wildest adherents of Darwinism would answer this last question in the affirmative, and they are not very confident in their answer to the first. And

as to filling up the desired missing link between man and the rest of the mundane creation, I heard, some years ago when Darwinism was stronger than it is now, a distinguished scientist acknowledge that this was only a

matter of hope and expectation; that in his opinion, at any rate, the gap waiting for this missing link was wider than that between the vegetable and mineral kingdoms.

It would be absurd to attempt to exhaust the subject in our present limits; but I trust I have said enough to show that the Church is not much worried by the assaults of science, which some within her pale, as well as outside, imagine to be so terrible. The fact simply is that her own system, being so truly scientific, makes her sympathize with science, when it keeps in its own specialty, whatever it may be, and does not exalt what are called working hypotheses into ascertained laws. Much more could be easily said, but we must proceed to consider the Church's attitude toward progress.

---

## **THE FRIEND OF TRUE PROGRESS.**

### **The Catholic Idea.**

---

There is another idea, often entertained about the Catholic Church by people outside, which is somewhat similar to that last mentioned with regard to her supposed opposition to physical science. It is that she is not up to the times in what is commonly called civilization; that her people, though perhaps using as much as others the various modern improvements of life, when able to do so, do not contribute to them as much as the rest. The same opinion about us seems still to some extent to exist, which I remember to have been expressed in the school geographies of my early days, in which the various

**Is the Church Up to  
Date ?**

countries were classified as "savage, barbarous, civilized, and enlightened." No Catholic country was, in these geographies, ever represented as "enlightened;" the best it could hope for was to be considered as "civilized." This, in one sense, I suppose, merely meant that its religion had not been enlightened by the glorious spiritual light of the Reformation; but still the idea went with this, that the Reformation shed an intellectual light on man, as well as a spiritual one; perhaps, some indeed imagine that the revival of learning, known as the Renaissance, was due to or even caused by the Reformation, instead of having preceded it, and having been, as those most interested in the Renaissance generally complained, impeded and endangered by it.

At any rate, the idea prevailed half a century ago and previously, and probably still prevails, that not only abstract science, of which I have been speaking, but all its applications to the comforts and joys of life, is due to its not being kept down by the weight of this unreasonable superstition which the Catholic religion is so

**Are Catholics In Dark-  
ness?**

often supposed to be; or in other words, that we Catholics, kept by our religion in intellectual darkness, have not the ability to discover how much better off we could be without it. Of course it is sometimes believed and confidently stated that we are in moral as well as intellectual darkness; it certainly would seem that such must be the case in the minds of those who are so ignorant as to believe that we have only to tell the priest about our sins, and obtain their forgiveness, without any sorrow or sincere purpose of amendment. This idea and others like it are, as I have just said, the result of ignorance,

and can easily be dispelled by any one who cares enough about the truth to inquire. In fact, the shoe is on the other foot; for the Reformation started out with the idea, for a long time openly proclaimed, that faith alone justifies without works; that is to say, that a man is just as acceptable before God if he goes on sinning as if he lives a good life, if only he has faith in Christ as his Savior. And this idea was for a time not only proclaimed, but acted on, with the results that were to be expected; but it has been, practically at any rate, abandoned long since as a mistake, so that we are not urging it now to show that Protestants must necessarily be dreadful people. It is a pity that they cannot be equally just and fair to us.

Really as far as moral darkness is concerned, there is not a very great difference in our standards on most points, except that as our principles are better settled, and give a better rational foundation to build on, we have been able to elaborate the whole matter of morals more thoroughly, and to avoid better false or simply traditional impressions; as, for example, the idea haunting many non-Catholics that it is wrong to have any enjoyment, however innocent in itself, on Sunday. But our own moral system would, I may confidently say, commend itself thoroughly to all willing to study it, though perhaps to some it might seem too strict or severe.

Still, it is urged that Catholic countries are not in fact so moral as Protestant ones. This is a subject which can only be discussed by statistics, and in that way only imperfectly; and it has often been so discussed, without any disadvantage to us. But as it is not our real subject



now, we must let it pass for the present. The only bearing of it for us here is whether the moral principles of the Catholic religion, observed as they are by good Catholics, not by careless or bad ones, tend to moral progress or against it, and on this point there can be no doubt in the minds of those who really care to know.

The question comes back to that proposed in the beginning, namely, "is the Church in sympathy with what is so much admired outside of it; that is to say with what is commonly and rightly called material civilization?" And in this we include not only such matters as railroads, telegraphs, telephones, trolley cars, and the like, but also the modern movements for the general physical and intellectual well-being of mankind, such as the care of the sick and the poor, abolition of slavery, political equality, total abstinence, and probably above all education?

This question evidently requires some distinctions in its discussion. The Church does not hastily take sides in matters on which something may be said on both sides; nor does it take extreme views, unless it is quite evident that such are the only views that can be taken. As to the care of the sick and the poor, it can hardly be open to much censure from any one, for its charity in these respects is obvious to all. Some may indeed imagine that it encourages poverty, by too indiscriminate a care for all who are in need; but any one familiar with the working of such a Catholic organization as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will hardly give much weight to such a charge. Mistakes will occur of course but it will be found that charity organization

**The Church More  
Deliberate.**

societies outside the Church can not justly claim to be more careful to avoid them than we are, especially when the greater volume of work done by us is considered.

With regard to other matters, needing more thought as to their advisability, it is quite true that the Church may come in a little late on some measures which prove in the end to have been good ones. Such may seem to some to have been the case with regard to the slavery question in this country; but even now there may be some doubt as to the final outcome of the emancipation. The Church would certainly have preferred to accomplish the result in a more peaceful way; and not so quickly.

With regard to temperance, it may be well also to say a very few words. It would be absurd to suppose that the Church does not favor it, or does not encourage voluntary sacrifices on the part of her members, even to the extent of total abstinence from alcoholic drinks. But as to forcing it, or attempting to do so by legal measures, that is quite another matter, on which opinion in the Church, as well as outside, will probably always be divided.

As to education, the subject has been so much discussed, and the position taken by the Church is so well known, that I need hardly say much about it just now. No intelligent person imagines that she is opposed to education; the simple fact is that Catholics prefer, as any one else would, that the matters of instruction should not be such as we consider false, and that others which we regard as true, and extremely important, should not be omitted.

So much then for these matters of detail, which do not help very much to bring out the main point which I

have undertaken to present here. And what is this main point?

It is that, according to our opponents, Catholics are opposed to the schemes so much in favor outside the Church for the betterment of things generally. Now this is not the case; if it is evident that the schemes will really result in such betterment, we are all in their favor.

**A Different Point  
of View.**

But there is really a difference in our view from that generally taken by those not of our faith. And what is it? It is simply that we put spiritual matters, which belong so much to the domain of faith, first, and temporal matters second; whereas, outside the Church, the contrary order is generally followed.

This is not exactly the fault of those outside. It simply arises from the fact that owing to the confusion resulting from the intellectual disaster known as the Reformation, the fruits of which are continually becoming more and more apparent, matters of both faith and morals, for those outside the Church, have become so obscured, that they necessarily have to take this secondary place. "What," they might ask, "is the use of insisting, or dwelling much on matters, however important they may be in themselves, on which there seems to be no possibility of having a certain conclusion or conviction? Let us," those without faith may reasonably say, "attend to such as do belong to the sphere of certain knowledge and science." The Catholic religion, as I have endeavored to show, does, with us, belong to this sphere. It is, with us, a true science, more certain than that of astronomy or any other, and of course incomparably more important; but with those, who, on account of

not following scientific methods in its study, have lost the scientific knowledge of it which we have, it has fallen from the place which, as every one can see, it ought to hold.

Therefore, we cannot, as those without our faith may do, regard the great material progress of modern times as being of the highest importance. We acknowledge that it

**Material Progress**  
**Secondary.**

is important and of great value, as increase in any kind of knowledge must be when rightly used; but we regard other kinds of knowledge as incomparably more important and valuable. As St. Paul says, "We cease not to pray for you, and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God."

"Increasing in the knowledge of God." That this is far the most important knowledge, all who believe in Him must surely confess; but those who have been deprived or have cut themselves off from the means which He has appointed in His Church for such increase of knowledge have to content themselves with, and make the most of, such other kinds of knowledge, which, we may say, they have been obliged to find out the means of increasing, and which they have, in these last centuries, so successfully used. We are far from finding fault with them for this; it is all excellent in its way and degree, and we are quite willing to work with them on the same lines, and many of us have had a special attraction to do so and find a special satisfaction in so doing. But as God has given us in His revelation the elements of the

much higher knowledge or science of Himself, on which to build and develop the chief of all sciences, that of Catholic theology, we must necessarily regard those occupied in it as privileged above all others, and believe that our highest duty and our truest happiness in this world is, as St. Peter tells us, to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," which growth, for those who have rejected the revelation on which it is based, has unfortunately become impossible. Any true theology, for them, is reduced to the limits of natural religion; and even in this they are liable to err, by following merely human guides, with false doctrines of philosophy, on which natural religion so much depends.

This, then, is the distinctively Catholic idea of mental progress; to increase in the knowledge of God, and to look, for the more complete knowledge of the mysteries of His creation, rather to the clearer light which He will give us when the veils and clouds of this mortal life have passed away, than to that which is obtainable here; though not neglecting, more for His sake than for our own, to use what it is His will that we should have now.

**The Catholic Idea of Progress.**

There is, however, another aspect of the matter, which it is important to recognize, and in which the Catholic position with regard to the "uplifting" (to use a popular term of the present day) of mankind differs quite widely from that which is generally in favor outside the Church. In this we are concerned rather with an increase of charity, and a progress in it, than in knowledge.

In this, the difference is perhaps well expressed in

the familiar proverb, "Charity begins at home." In the common acceptation of this proverb it seems to be rather a selfish maxim. And we may say it is so in a certain sense. But, in that sense, it has been made obligatory on us by God Himself.

For as Christians, we cannot neglect the order of the commandments as given to us by our Lord Himself, which, after all, are an abridgment of the two tables into which the Decalogue of Mount Sinai is divided. The

first is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy  
**The Divine Order.** God with thy whole heart, and with  
thy whole soul, and with thy whole  
mind." The second: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor  
as thyself."

This order (absolutely to be followed, for our Lord says that the first is the greatest commandment,) clearly shows that the proverb is true, that charity begins at home; that is to say, that religion, for every individual, must consist primarily in his own individual relation to God, with which others are not directly concerned. Or, to put it in still fewer words, if we want to uplift mankind in general, we must begin by uplifting ourselves. Each one must go to work to uplift himself personally, not merely expect to share in the general uplift. And the reason for this is quite plain, though God does not always give a reason for His commandments. It is that we ourselves, of our own strength or wisdom, are not able to accomplish the uplifting. It is only God Himself who can do that; we can only help in it by uniting ourselves with Him. And we cannot even accomplish this union except by the grace or help which He will give us. And the first step toward this on our part

is prayer, though this does not originate with us, but it is He that moves us to it. This is a most important teaching of Catholic theology, against what is known as the Pelagian heresy; and one not ascertainable simply by natural reason.

The only way then for us to be of any service in the desired uplift of mankind is for God to help us, and for us to accept His help and work with it; and in the first place, toward this personal and individual union with Himself. And it may be that this will be all that He wishes or calls on us to do. So it was with St. Mary Magdalen; so it was, in a supereminent degree, and a special manner, with our Blessed Mother herself.

This contemplative life, as it is called, is, probably, for those who are truly called to it, the most useful of

all for the uplifting, not merely of the individual, but through prayer, of mankind in general. This is the Catholic doctrine, in marked contrast to the feverish activity of the merely human philanthropist, who puts the second commandment in place of the first. If we want to secure not merely the intellectual, or the material, but (what is far more important) the moral progress of mankind, the "one thing necessary," as our Lord Himself has told us, in justifying Mary against Martha's complaint, is to be in individual and spiritual union with Him. He will probably then call a soul so united with Himself to some actual external works for others; but without such union, such external works will be of little use, comparatively.

This, then, is again the Catholic idea of progress, of obtaining the only important progress of the world, that which consists in virtue and true happiness both in

the temporal and the spiritual order. Material and intellectual progress, without it, though good in themselves, are likely to result in more harm than good. This distinction between the Christian and the merely natural idea of progress affects the whole idea of life in the Catholic or true Christian idea.

---

## **THE PURPOSE OF LIFE.**

### **A Contrast of Ideals.**

---

The Catholic idea of life, or of the way it should be lived, is closely connected with the Catholic idea of general progress. To bring out its essential features, it may perhaps be well, in the first place, to describe those which prevail more and more outside the Church; though of course we grant that our own idea is still, to a considerable extent, retained by various Christian denominations; really more or less so retained in proportion to their less or greater departure from the Catholic traditional standard.

We may say, then, that the idea of life, which seems to be more and more prevailing outside the Church, is similar to that which has always been entertained by the irreligious world, though it is not so entirely worldly, in the common meaning of that word. Our common meaning, when we speak of a worldly life, is that it is devoted to the pursuit and enjoyment of simply earthly objects and pleasures; usually to the acquisition of wealth

**A Worldly Life.**



by those who do not already possess it, and the spending of it on those things which it will procure. In short, it simply seeks and enjoys what the world has to offer. If one who leads it sacrifices any of them, for himself, it is that his family, or others in whom he is interested, may have them. It may not openly transgress any distinct law of God, so far at any rate as such laws are manifest to the general conscience; though the chances are, of course, that it sometimes will do so. But it simply cannot conceive of any good reason for not seeking or obtaining what the world has to give, for oneself or for some one else, unless such seeking or attaining should be distinctly prohibited by some law of recognized obligation. It understands quite well, of course, the obligation of justice; it recognizes that the worldly goods owned by another must not be taken from him; but in the world, generally, pretty much all obligations are reducible to this, at any rate if it is supplemented by what is called one's duty to oneself, as regards the preservation of one's health, and capacity for healthy enjoyment.

This view of our life here, of course, has always existed; but it was distinctly adopted and (so to speak) sanctified, or considered a truly Christian one, at the time of the Protestant Reformation. We do not deny that it was often acted on by Catholics previous to that time, or that many Catholics act on it now; but all who do so are dimly aware, at any rate, that their doing so is not in accordance with Catholic principles; that it is not the Catholic ideal life; that the Catholic idea or standard of life is something quite different.

But at the Reformation, the idea of the Christian

life was changed by the originator of the Reformation himself, in a very conspicuous way. He, a priest vowed to celibacy, took for a wife a nun similarly vowed. We need not discuss whether in this arrangement the parties had a good conscience; Catholics, of course, have a pretty strong negative opinion on the matter. But if they are believed to have had such a conscience, and their followers to have had the same in imitating them, it would only show still more plainly a change in the Christian idea then brought in. And whatever may have been the case then, it is quite evident that such a change has really been accomplished in Protestant Christianity as it exists now. Indeed the previous idea died out quite rapidly. Queen Elizabeth of England, it is true, did not have much respect for a married clergy; she had been brought up with Catholic ideas and traditions; but we can not know or find out much about her real sentiments, except that she did not have much respect for anything that interfered with her plans. She did not care much whether the clergy were married or not; all she wanted was that they should be under her control, not that of the Pope. Probably no nominally Christian woman was ever less influenced by religious convictions of any kind.

Well, at any rate, the fact is obvious that at present, and for a long time past, outside of the Catholic and the Oriental churches, the idea has got firm possession that the correct Christian view is to enjoy all the enjoyable things that this life has to give, unless, for some either plain or more or less mysterious reason, they have been definitely prohibited by some law either natural, like those of health, or positively laid down by Divine authority. It is true that there have been, especially of late and

**The Catholic Idea  
Rejected.**

among Anglicans particularly, some reversions to Catholic ideas; but these exceptions, that is to say the fact that they are so evidently exceptions, only prove the rule, that is, what is the rule. Voluntary fasting, or mortification except for the sake of bodily health, has become a matter almost incomprehensible outside of the Church. Of course there are exceptional cases in which it may be undertaken for some spiritual object, and in which it may be as generally applauded as heroic, as it would be if the object were a material one. If, for instance, a missionary wishes to reach some tribe of savages to preach to them, and cannot do so without undergoing great privations, it will be understood and admired, just as it would be if his object was the North or South Pole, instead of the savage tribe. But what I mean is that bodily austerity not necessary for any special object, and that would naturally tend to prevent the attainment of any object, rather than help to attain it, has become an incomprehensible thing in the non-Catholic world generally. That a student should burn the midnight oil to study some subject, especially if it is a practical one, why of course that is all right; but that a saint, who has work to do during the day, should spend the night in contemplative prayer, without even asking God for anything in particular, instead of taking his needed sleep, why surely that is simply ruinous to his usefulness.

To his usefulness; yes, that is the explanation, we may say, of the whole idea of our life, as considered even by the well-meaning non-Catholic mind. The non-Catholic idea is that we are here to render some direct service to mankind, probably chiefly to those in most

direct connection with us, but it may be also to humanity in general; and that everything we do must be subordinated to this.

In these latter times, this idea of the service of humanity in general has become so popular that that of the service of God has got very much in the background, so much so that even the existence itself of God has become either disbelieved or regarded, if I may say so, as of little practical consequence.

**Humanity In God's  
Place.**

Humanity has taken His place. The idea may seem, does indeed seem to many, to be a very high, noble and unselfish one. "What difference," it is said, "whether there is a future life for ourselves individually? There is a future life for humanity in general, we feel sure of that; so if we can do something to put that on a higher plane, what matters it if we perish, when all that we can do has been done? God, if there be a God, does not need any service from us. We can put Him on no higher plane. All the time we spend in simply gazing at Him, worshiping Him, or offering ourselves in any way in sacrifice to Him, is simply time thrown away."

This, we may say, is the modern gospel, and that to which what is good or well-meaning outside the Church seems to be tending. It does not necessarily deny the existence of God, but it regards that existence as having no special significance for us, and as putting no special obligations on us. Of course with this has come a loss of faith in any higher state of mankind according to God's original plan, of any fall by sin from that state, of any need of a restoration to it by a Redeemer atoning for sin. No, the idea is that humanity is good, but is to gradually

become better, not by a redemption from outside, but by its inherent powers and the exertions of all the individuals constituting it.

Of course this modern idea could be enlarged on much more, and developed in all its details. But enough, perhaps, has been said for our limits. It is time that we should bring out in contrast to it the unchangeable Catholic or true Christian idea of life.

The most obvious points of difference in it from that we have just considered is that, first, it is not a life simply of humanity in general but of the individual; and, secondly, that it is eternal, not perishable. And we cannot begin to treat of it better than by using the words of Christ Our Lord Himself.

These are His words, as we read them in St. John's Gospel: "This," He says, "is eternal life; that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

To know God: to know of His existence, of course, but more than that. Not only to know Him, but to know Him personally; to be acquainted with Him, for it is this which the Latin word "*cognosco*," here used, means. Mankind, the Christian faith tells us, did so know Him in the beginning, but lost that knowledge or intimate acquaintance by sin. Eternal life, of which our true life here is the beginning, is the renewal of that which was then lost. And how is it to be renewed?

I hardly need to say that according to our idea and teaching, it is to be renewed by Christ. Not by forming theories as to what Christ's views or plans were for the renovation of society, such as so many form at the

present day, which theories are usually simply those of the ones who made them, and those of Christ only because, in their minds, they are what His ought to have been. No, not in this way, and not in any way of external work on society or mankind according to what we imagine to have been His ideas, but in the way of coming to Him personally for our own sake, not for that of mankind in general. And in order in the first place to know God for ourselves by knowing the revelation of Him in Christ; according to Christ's own words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me."

And how are we to know Christ and His revelation? I have said before that the only secure way is the one which He Himself has appointed; not by picking out texts which suit our ideas in the written record of His words, or those of His apostles, but by listening to the living representative which He told us He would leave in the world, to preserve us from error, and to teach us the truth about Him; that is to say, His Church, founded on the Rock of Peter, against which He distinctly promised that the gates of hell should not prevail.

This sure and reliable knowledge of Christ and of the Father through Him, and the love of Him and of the Father which follows from it, with firm adhesion to His will, and true repentance for all our sins against it, and acceptance of the means He has provided for the forgiveness of those sins, and the attainment of an individual and personal union with God by these means, is, then, the Catholic idea of life. This is the life that we are made for, which we are here in this world for; not to

struggle and weary ourselves in the endeavor to do something by ourselves, or for ourselves or others, which after all God can do by Himself, but to unite ourselves with Him in the first place as the one thing necessary, and then learn from Him by prayer with whatever indications He may give us, what use He wishes to make of us. But we have to remember, as I have just

**The One Thing  
Necessary.**

said, that union with Him is the one thing necessary. He is, as He has told us, "the vine, we the branches."

"Abide in me," He has said, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing."

This, I say again, is the Catholic idea of life; the life that the branches have, while they remain in union with the vine. Of course it is far from being as the unbelieving world would have life to be; that is, simply making the most of what the world has to give us in the way of pleasure, or the acquisition of money, power, or worldly wisdom. And neither is it the endeavor—comparatively noble though that is—by ways of our own devising, to uplift the world in general, or even any portion of it, or to bring about a betterment of humanity.

And do not imagine that this is merely a special view of mine, or of any other Catholic or set of Catholics. It is the official teaching of the

**The Teaching of the  
Church.**

Church; the first lesson that Catholic children learn. "Why did God make you?" is the question asked immediately in our catechisms, as soon as it has been explained that He did

make or create us. The answer is "God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in the next." Not a word in this about all the multifarious activities in which the earnest and zealous philanthropists of the present day would make life to consist.

This Catholic idea of life is carried to its highest perfection in the saints. They are the examples the Church sets for us, to show what the highest standard of life here is. It consists, in its completion, in an absolute abandonment of all things not related to God's love or service, of all enjoyment of what is lower than Himself for its own sake. This is the ideal of the monk or nun, an ideal entirely incomprehensible to the world, and one which, as I have said, the Protestant Reformation distinctly rejected. This seems, even to many well-meaning and good people, to be wrong, and indeed a want of gratitude to God for what He has given us. But the reason for it is not a want of appreciation for what is good in itself as coming from Him, but an immensely higher appreciation of Him from whom it comes. The saint finds his highest happiness in God Himself, and in union with His will; and turns away from other happiness, not because it is in itself injurious, or must needs turn him from God, but because there is danger that it might do so.

But this, so far from preventing him from being of service to his neighbor, is really the most powerful help to him in being so, as experience most amply shows. For he knows that it is, usually, the greatest devotion and the best proof of love that he can give to God to be of such service; and also the love of his neighbor



is a direct fruit of that of God Himself, both of which Divine grace produces in his heart; and this fruit being produced by Divine love itself in him, is, so far as he is called to it, far more abundant than any that merely human love, energy or ability can bring forth.

I do not, as I said in the beginning, deny that this, the Catholic idea of life as it should be lived, is still found outside the Church in the various Christian denominations, though imperfectly developed on account of the injurious effects of the Reformation; but so far as it exists among them, it is a survival from the Catholic Church. The tendency is, especially of late, toward its extinction, and the substitution for it of the other which I have described. The special note of this latter is that it begins at the wrong end, or reverses the order of the commandments, by beginning with the service of humanity instead of that of God. It ought to lead to God, in spite of this reversal, however, and would do so, if it were not for what we may rightly call the unscientific manner, principally due to Protestantism, in which the revelation of Him has been treated.

The only real remedy for the evils from which we suffer, and are trying to remove, is that which God has provided in His Church; we must begin not with others, but with ourselves, by becoming branches of the true vine, and being filled with its life and strength; and then with that Divine strength work in the way He has appointed for us. We must realize that what the world really needs for its betterment and uplifting is its sanctification; that is to say, its being brought into that union with God which was lost by the fall; and that this can

only be effected through Christ our Lord and the means He has provided in His Church; but for us to bring these to bear on it, they must first be brought to bear on ourselves. To bring mankind into union with God, we must by His grace first accomplish that union for ourselves,

and the more perfectly we do it, the  
**The Life of the Saints.** greater our work for others will be.

One saint, carrying out perfectly in the Church of God the Catholic idea of life in his own life, will do more for his fellowmen than he could without it, though possessed of the greatest merely human ability or enthusiasm; for the power behind the work which he does is not that of man, but of God.





# THE CATHOLIC WORLD

THE OLDEST CATHOLIC MAGAZINE IN  
THE UNITED STATES

The Catholic World presents every month capable articles on matters of Catholic interest. Among its contributors are the best known writers of America. It publishes stories, short and long; essays; poems, and notices of recent books. If you wish to keep in touch with the best in contemporaneous Catholic literature, read The Catholic World.

---

**Subscription Price \$3.00 a year**

---

THE CATHOLIC WORLD  
120-122 West 60th Street  
New York City



# THE CATHOLIC WORLD

THE OLDEST CATHOLIC MAGAZINE IN  
THE UNITED STATES

The Catholic World presents every month capable articles on matters of Catholic interest. Among its contributors are the best known writers of America. It publishes stories, short and long; essays; poems, and notices of recent books. If you wish to keep in touch with the best in contemporaneous Catholic literature, read The Catholic World.

---

Subscription Price \$3.00 a year

---

THE CATHOLIC WORLD  
120-122 West 60th Street  
New York City

